



In the short time that the participating machines run, this semi-annual event demonstrates a valuable sense of how they work, how solidly built they are, and how the operators manage to tame these beasts!

## SUMMARY OF THE 2018 GREAT **FIREWOOD SHOOT-OUT®**

By Dave Boyt

**T**he 2018 Great Firewood Shoot-Out® was a combination of tried-and-true machines back for another go, as well as new innovative machines that proved that there are still ways to cut and split firewood waiting to be imagined and designed. Our Shoot-Out crew was also a combination of old and new. Don Tyson and I (old) welcomed Dave Schomp to our crew. Dave is an expert skid-steer operator. I really think he could balance a dime on its edge with any machine you put him in! He quickly sorted out the 100 tons of Shoot-Out logs (and we used every one of them) while Don and I figured out how in the world we were going to fit 9 of the biggest firewood processors (Friday) and 15 smaller machines (Saturday) into the 16,000-square-foot Shoot-Out area. We managed, but without enough room to spare for even a fellow with a splitting maul!

While that was going on, exhibitors were bringing their equipment into the Paul Bunyan Show. It seemed like one moment we were the only ones on the Guernsey County Fairgrounds and, in the blink of an eye, the 7-acre fairground was filled with every forestry, sawmill, and firewood processing machine imaginable! Everything from \$1 soft pretzels to \$350,000 tub grinders were for sale. Many of them had tents and banners raised, reminding me of a medieval jousting tournament (no, I'm not THAT old, but I've

been to a few reenactments).

Thursday night's rain made the Shoot-Out area more appropriate for mud wrestling than firewood processing. With many of the larger machines yet to be moved in, the red clay soil stuck to logs, boots, and tires. Some exhibitors rocked their vehicles and their 7-ton firewood processors back and forth in an attempt to get out of the ruts, sinking even deeper. The only vehicle that could reliably get around was a skid steer that floated over the mud on rubber tracks, and Dave's skill was put to the test, freeing stuck vehicles and moving equipment. Somehow, he managed to shoe-horn every machine into its slot, then brought in the logs. With seminars scheduled and more machines to bring into the Shoot-Out area, we kept an eye on the weather radar. A large front of thunderstorms was headed our way, and we braced for the worst, but, somehow, the storm front parted before it reached Cambridge, and we managed to stay dry.

The Firewood processors are allowed to warm up and have their engines running when the Shoot-Out starts. Many of the larger machines have to run 10 or 15 minutes just to warm up their engines and hydraulic oil. If you are of the "go big or go home" mindset, these are the ones that get your attention. After all, you don't just warm up a 125-hp John Deere diesel engine and 125 gallons of hydraulic oil, then bring a

60-inch-diameter blade up to speed with the turn of a key! After a brief introduction, a blast of an air horn kicked off the event, and the engines throttled up to a full-throated roar. The circle cutoff saws bobbed up and down like Oklahoma oil pumps, and the chain saw cutoffs kicked out a spray of sawdust while hydraulic rams crushed firewood through splitting wedges with over 20 tons of force before the wood was carried up a conveyor, then dropped into growing piles of split beech, oak, elm, and gum. It took less than 15 minutes for the first machines to shut down, and after 20 minutes, most of the firewood processors had finished.

Meanwhile, Brian Bond, our resident wood expert, was giving seminars on how to saw for grade. As usual, this hands-on seminar was filled to capacity. Our thanks to Norwood for providing sawmill and sawyer for the seminar.

Almost before the last piece of firewood hit the ground, the show crew was in the Shoot-Out area scooping up the firewood with bucket loaders to make room for the next round to take place Saturday morning. It was dark by the time we were finished moving most of the machines and wood into place for the Saturday morning event. Fridays are long—I don't even remember going to bed, just waking up the next morning, still on top of the blankets.

A "Lumberjack Slam" at Denny's for breakfast, then off to the Saturday show. Somehow, the weather held for Saturday morning, when the smaller processors and the firewood splitters had their time in the Shoot-Out. After a last-minute scramble to buck up the logs for the splitters and make final adjustments to the positioning of the firewood processors, the Saturday event began (almost) on time.

Mud is the nemesis of any chain saw, and the Shoot-Out firewood logs came with a good dose of Guernsey County clay embedded in the bark. Several of the machines had to replace chains after hitting the abrasive mud, while others did their best to power through it. With all the heavy iron out in the Shoot-Out arena, it might have been easy to miss the firewood splitters set up on the south end. Every year, we try to provide more wood, but once again, they all finished their task in under



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## The 2018 Great Firewood Shoot-Out

seven minutes. People who have split firewood by hand never cease to marvel at how effortlessly a hydraulic firewood splitter parts wood with knots and crotches, and slices through tough species like elm and gum that shrug off any assault with a splitting maul.

While most processors and splitters used conventional wedge splitters, several used box splitters, which pass the wood through a series of 3-inch or 4-inch squares, then return the unsplit portion for re-splitting. Without fail, these gave the best, most consistent firewood, though at a cost in production time. We also saw the first public display of a couple of prototype machines, and the reviews in this issue describe some of the challenges they had. I have a lot of respect for companies that were willing to put them in the Shoot-Out with the tried-and-true processors and splitters. The trend appears to be toward more automation, user-friendly operation, safety, and ever more production for the money.

If all you look at are the numbers, you are missing out on some of the most important aspects of what the Shoot-Out has to offer. Even in the short time that these machines run, you can get a good sense of how they work, how solidly built they are, and how the operators manage to tame these beasts. Then, of course, look at the cost, and figure out what makes the most sense for you. Speaking of money, like many

show-goers, I just about maxed out my credit card (again) this year on chains, files, wedges, a new cant hook, log cone, and Bunyan Burgers.

Both the Shoot-Out and the Paul Bunyan Show were international in scope, with companies based in the U.S., Canada, Finland, and Slovenia participating. The Japa (pronounced “Yappa”) team from Finland seemed to particularly enjoy the show. Who would have thought that the Guernsey County Fairgrounds would be an international tourist destination? Just goes to show that once you’ve got sawdust in your veins, a good logging show is better than Niagara Falls!

Finally, my thanks to the Ohio Forestry Association, the timekeepers, and the staff at the Paul Bunyan Show, who went out of their way to help make the Shoot-Out possible. Our editor, Walter Andrzejewski, as always, kept on top of things and helped iron out any wrinkles, while his sister, Yvonne, kept an eye on the *Sawmill & Woodlot* booth and made sure everyone was where they needed to be—and kept track of the ever-important time sheets. J.R. [Salzman], we missed you—hope to see you next year! ■

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*Dave Boyt has a BS degree in Forest Management and an MS in Wood Technology. He manages a tree farm (2006 Missouri Tree Farm of the Year), and operates a band saw sawmill.*

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